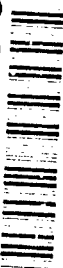


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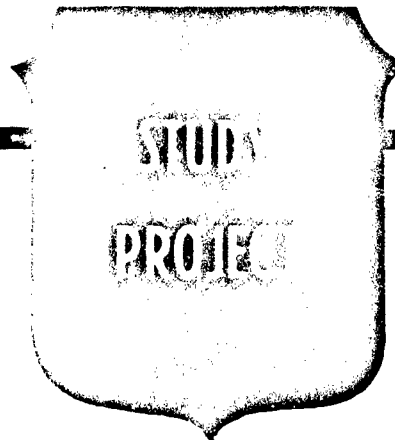
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THE SINGLAUB AFFAIR: MAJOR GENERAL JOHN K. SINGLAUB
AND
THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION - SHOWDOWN ON DRAWDOWN

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN ANDREW VALERSKY
United States Army

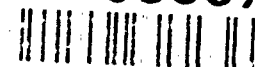
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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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THE SINGLAUB AFFAIR: MAJOR GENERAL JOHN K. SINGLAUB AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION - SHOWDOWN ON DRAWDOWN

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
6 May 1991

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ABSTRACT

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President Jimmy Carter entered the White House with a number of campaign pledges, one of which was to return all U.S. ground forces from Korea over a four to five year period. Korea also formed one of the Carter Administration's first tests of a human - rights based foreign policy, for the Park regime was notorious for its repressive rule. Major General Singlaub, then Chief of Staff of U.S. Forces, Korea, disagreed with the conclusion of the administration that forces could be withdrawn without the risk of war and was so quoted in the press just days before actual drawdown negotiations began. A train of events ensued which saw both the ultimate failure of President Carter to achieve a troop withdrawal or to influence the internal policies of the Park regime, and the dismissal of Maj. Gen. Singlaub from his position as Chief of Staff. A description of the events leading to Singlaub's dismissal and eventual retirement are presented, and the rationale for his actions is analyzed. The Singlaub Affair demonstrates the difficulty of distinguishing ethical or moral positions established at personal risk - where individuals choose to shape the course of events through deliberate action - and those instances where events take their own course and individuals are swept along by - in the final analysis - personal flaws. While the Singlaub Affair does not present a role model for the soldier seeking an example of a moral or ethical stand, the charges and counter - charges in the press and other forms demonstrate the need to understand the essential hierarchical difference between the soldier's duty to obey, his institutional loyalties, and the individual's moral and ethical imperatives. The Affair also underscores the difficulty in establishing the powers of moral differentiation fundamental to responsible dissent.

I. INTRODUCTION.

"The recent controversy surrounding Maj. Gen. Singlaub underscores the dilemma in which senior American Military officers find themselves. If they acquiesce in a policy they believe to be utterly wrong, they risk being vilified as cowardly, amoral careerists if that policy ends in disaster. If they resign rather than implement such a policy, their opposition loses much of its legitimacy in the public sector and all of its effectiveness within the military itself. Yet if they make their opposition known when still in command all the while acknowledging their determination to execute that policy if it remains unchanged, they are attacked for threatening the principle of "civilian supremacy" and dismissed or transferred..."¹

On May 19th, 1977, the Washington Post published an interview² by their Tokyo Bureau Chief with General John K. Singlaub, then Chief of Staff, U.S. Forces in Korea. It appeared that a senior officer had made a decision to publicly challenge a policy decision promulgated by his lawful civilian superior - his Commander-in-Chief and President of the United States, Jimmy Carter. The interview brought into public and Congressional scrutiny President Carter's plan to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea. The Carter Administration was dealt a stunning and very public blow, eventually recanting a policy which had been a campaign pledge. Maj. Gen. Singlaub was almost immediately removed from his position in Korea and by 1978 had retired at the age of 56, with no formal ceremony.³ The Press implied that he was being particularly

singled out by noting that he was not granted disability benefits despite *"practices that had for years allowed retiring generals and admirals with long service to collect generous disability benefits that could be translated into income tax reductions on retirement pay."*⁴ Such media coverage implied that the Carter Administration had sought a punitive retirement for an officer who had publicly dissented against a Presidential Policy (without specifying whether or not Singlaub, in fact, qualified for disability upon retirement).⁵

Many, both in the press and in Congress, chose to view the incident in much the same manner as reflected in the introductory quote - a classic confrontation between the moral obligation to speak out - to break the chain of command and appeal to the American public - against a policy which was held to be both dangerous and ill-advised, and the principle of military subservience to civilian control. Indeed, Maj. Gen. Singlaub's first public remarks following his retirement included both a criticism of the Carter Administration's conduct with respect to the withdrawal issue, and the expressed view that, although he believed in civilian control of the military, *"...a professional officer has to be able to distinguish between proper and improper dissent and between proper and improper support."*⁶ This paper examines whether or not Maj. Gen. Singlaub followed his own professional ethic, the degree to which he properly distinguished between the forms of support and dissent, and to the extent possible his motivation for the actions that brought such a swift end to his career.

When and how to draw the line between loyalty to the chain of command, both military and civilian, and the dictates of conscience has been and will continue to be a sensitive issue. Does the case of Maj. Gen. Singlaub present us with some insights into moral and ethical leadership which can aid soldiers to discern where their duty lies ? We are, after all, a community of professionals which cherishes loyalty as one of the foundations of our military ethic. To break the bonds of the profession by publicly challenging the chain of command is an act which may be contradictorily attributed to moral courage, egotism, or bad judgement. It is likely, in fact, that an

individual who chooses to so act will be characterized as possessing all of the aforementioned attributes - one of the penalties for stepping beyond the accepted bounds of institutional behavior. Recently we have seen the institutional pressures that can be brought to bear when an individual challenges the judgement, competence and integrity of a fellow, but senior, colleague. Dr. Margot O'Toole originally raised questions in 1986 about the validity of Dr. Theresa Imanishi-Kari's research findings on the immune system. Only recently has it been acknowledged that key data in the paper were fake, and that Dr. O'Toole's commitment to scientific integrity was, and is, commendable. Meanwhile, she lost her job, house, and feared that her husband would also lose his job. She suffered personal attacks, including a Nobel Laureate's description of her as a "*disgruntled postdoctoral fellow*". Challenging an institution is not a task to be taken lightly, even when the challenge amounts to no more than raising questions.⁷

Certainly, the norms of institutional behavior can inhibit soldiers and other professionals, both individually and collectively, from challenging or opposing policies which are morally corrupt or professionally incompetent. The example of the German General Staff prior to and during the Second World War is, perhaps, the most tragic, both for the individual soldier and the world as a whole. However, while most would hold those generals both individually and collectively morally culpable for the cataclysmic events wrought by Nazi Germany upon multitudes of suffering peoples, the argument has been advanced that they were prisoners of their own traditions and could not be expected to act otherwise, despite the conflict between individual moral codes and the atrocities perpetrated under the banner of the Swastika.⁸ The line these senior officers chose to draw between public honour and private morality we now recognize as having distorted the meaning of honor and set it apart from adherence to fundamental moral and ethical concepts. The German General Staff focused on their traditional oath to the person of the Head of State, and bound itself by that oath to paths that we rightly consider morally repugnant. Samuel P. Huntington, writing on the military mind, remarked that loyalty and obedience are the highest

military virtues." The Nazi's ultimate distortion of the meaning of honor manipulated those virtues with the slogan "*Mein Ehre Heisst Treue*", placing honor as hostage to blind obedience.

Clearly we in the United States would prefer to believe that the individual soldier should ideally possess the character, intellectual discrimination and moral courage to choose morally and ethically sound courses of action even under circumstances when such actions place the individual in conflict with institutional loyalties. Our military ethic has been characterized as one which puts principle above self-interest and is founded on personal integrity and moral courage.¹⁰ But such acts of moral courage demanding extraordinary judgmental differentiation are, perhaps, more difficult than those demanding physical courage. Therefore I chose to analyze the Singlaub Affair, as it became known, for lessons that might prove valuable to soldiers in instances where conscience comes into conflict with policy. My analysis and conclusions as to the merit of Maj. Gen. Singlaub's actions as an example of moral courage and leadership follow.

II. BACKGROUND TO SHOWDOWN.

*It isn't what we don't know that gives us trouble, it's
what we know that ain't so.*

Will Rogers

Although the purpose of this paper is not to weigh the relative merits of the Carter administration's actions against those of Maj. Gen. Singlaub, a clearer grasp of the forces at play in the Singlaub Affair can be reached from understanding how that incident was woven into the context of the times. In particular, the United States as a whole was reeling in the aftermath of successive shocks: the collapse of South Vietnam, *rapprochement* with China, Watergate, and the economic effects of oil embargoes, to name but a few. Containment, a national policy first enunciated by George F. Kennan, had gradually pushed idealistic reform aside in favor of stability in opposition to the advance of Communism and allied revolutionary movements. Although events have subsequently shown the basic wisdom of Kennan's course, at the time the implementation of the policy appeared to have developed serious flaws. In particular, a reaction had begun to set in against the *realpolitik* of Henry Kissinger, whose remark that given the choice between "justice and disorder, on the one hand, and injustice and order on the other, I would always choose the latter.", seemed to many to reflect that America's leadership had strayed far off-course from heartland America's historical view of the Nation and itself.¹¹

Onto this stage stepped Jimmy Carter, who couched the 1976 race for the presidency in terms of a contest between the insiders or power elite, whose policies were morally bankrupt, and a new generation of outsiders, who were willing, and able, to make the changes necessary to restore national self-esteem. While such claims are not new to politics, the degree to which this

claim was indeed true - with respect to being outsiders - is certainly unusual. Not only were Carter and his band of Georgians outsiders to the Washington Establishment, they made it quite clear that they were determined to maintain that status. In doing so, they managed to alienate a significant proportion of the professional bureaucrats, soldiers, politicians and even press who expected that their advice and opinions would be at least sought, if not heeded.¹² From this can be drawn a general inference that suspicion existed as to whether Carter was prepared to seek or accept the assessments of institutional professionals in the formulation and conduct of policy. Understandably, many professionals both in and out of uniform were uneasy

Carter's 1977 inaugural address stressed *"Our commitment to human rights must be absolute ..."*, leaving no doubt as to the central role human rights would play in his administration's foreign policy.¹³ And the record of the first year of the Carter Presidency testifies to his efforts to execute such a policy. Carter reaffirmed his campaign objective to withdraw troops from Korea in one of his first press conferences. While domestically this raised little reaction, Asians were shocked. Japan, in particular, voiced its opposition as early as February¹⁴. Such a policy was not without opposition within his own circle of advisors. Cyrus Vance, his Secretary of State, was concerned over both the campaign pledge to withdraw troops from Korea and the application of a human rights - based policy with respect to South Korea.¹⁵

Carter's 1976 presidential campaign had been long on broad moral issues, but, as mentioned he had early (1975) pledged to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from Korea within four to five years of his inauguration.¹⁶ South Korea certainly represented an apt target for the application of an human-rights oriented foreign policy, and was considered by many as the test case for such a policy. The last elections with even a pretence of legality had been held in 1971, and subsequently, President Park had liberally used rule by emergency decree, obviating the most basic constitutional safeguards. Dissenters had been imprisoned and the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, the KCIA, was gaining a widespread reputation for torture and mistreatment

of challengers to the Park Regime. Quite clearly, the Park Regime was repressive and dictatorial, although it also was responsible for a remarkable surge in economic growth. Park attempted to counter growing criticism within the United States with a well-financed propaganda campaign and an equally well-financed, but disastrous, attempt to bribe members of the U.S. Congress. Koreagate, as it became known, only served to further single out South Korea as the principle noncommunist target of Carter's human rights crusade.¹⁷ Thus, the events that followed appear to have a certain sense of inevitability.

While Carter was formulating his Korean policy, it is significant to note that a number of varying estimates existed concerning the capabilities of the North Koreans, and, in fact, a number of reassessments were being done by various agencies. Later, the release of an Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence(ACSI)-directed study would prove to be the final nail in the coffin for Carter's withdrawal plan, but at the time of the incident the controversy appears to have been over three major areas: the size and equipment of the North Koreans, the contributions to the overall military balance of the 2nd Division, and the intentions of Kim Il Sung. Maj. Gen. Singlaub, for example, testified before Congress that an assessment to which he was privy had reassessed the North Korean level of readiness as much higher than had been previously thought, with significantly higher equipment levels, particularly tanks, disposed in such a manner that an offensive capability was more a matter of intent than *material*.¹⁸ On the other hand, a Congressional Budget Office Study made public on May 18, 1977, just a day prior to the publication of The Washington Post's Singlaub article, substantiated the Administration position *"that American forces could be withdrawn, without jeopardizing the military balance or with it [sic] the political and strategic stability of (Korea)"*. The study reportedly used the latest Pentagon secret studies.¹⁹

The role of the 2nd Division had been earlier questioned as to its actual effect on the military balance should a conflict arise. There appears to have been some debate within the military itself. In fact, Congressional testimony in 1975 conceded that the Republic of Korea (ROK) forces were sufficient in themselves and that the 2nd Division might therefore be available as a Pacific reserve. With the emerging change in assessments generated by the ACSI study, this opinion withered within the military, at least.²⁰

Despite Nixon's *rapprochement* with China and the Carter Administration's goal to normalize U.S. - Chinese relations, Kim Il Sung remained the most impenetrable factor in the calculus of risk. Normalization might deprive Kim of a geographically contiguous sponsor, but, then, as now, it was difficult to find a seer willing to predict that the North Korean leader would follow a rational course. The unpredictability of Kim Il Sung, coupled with the emerging picture of a here-to-fore undetected build-up, were perhaps the gravest concerns of military leaders within the Pentagon and in Korea.

Carter's earliest meeting with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in January left no doubt that he was serious about his pledge to withdraw troops from Korea. Events moved rapidly in the early days of his administration and by the 26th of January, Carter had issued Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 13, which, *inter alia*, requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff examine courses of action for dealing with reductions in U.S. conventional ground forces in Korea. The U.S. command in Korea, as might be expected, was consulted on a number of alternative withdrawal schemes. The JCS, by 7 March, responded to the Secretary of Defense and the JCS position then became one of a series of options in an interagency memorandum prepared as a collective response to the PRM. While the JCS had recommended that no significant reduction occur above those already programmed, they also concluded that a phased reduction of 7,000 Army spaces could be made by the end of FY82 without seriously degrading the deterrence value of our presence in Korea. The memorandum was then reviewed by a Policy

Review Committee on the 21st of April. The National Security Council, chaired by the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, met on the 27th of April to consider the issue (the services were represented at both the Policy Review Committee and NSC meetings by the Chairman of the JCS, Gen. George S. Brown (USAF)), and on 5 May Carter issued Presidential Directive PD/NSC-12, which laid out specifics with respect to withdrawal. Copies were received by the JCS on 6 May and relevant extracts provided to the service chiefs by the 10th of May.²¹

While the Presidential Review Memorandum was being worked in the interagency process, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, left for a visit to the troops in Korea. He arrived on the 27th of April and while there he attended a luncheon at which Maj. Gen. Singlaub was present. In the course of conversation, the subject of troop withdrawals arose and Maj. Gen. Singlaub commented on possible actions which could be taken *since the decision had not yet been made*. Gen. Rogers responded that in his opinion the decision to withdraw had, in fact, been made, and that what remained to decide was how best to accomplish the withdrawal. Maj. Gen. Singlaub then asked if Gen. Rogers had been given a rationale for withdrawal, and Rogers replied he had been given none.²² This statement may have caused Singlaub to assume that the advice and counsel of senior military officers was neither being sought nor taken by President Carter and may have been the match which sparked the swift chain of events which led to both the end of Singlaub's career and the eventual repudiation of the administration's plans for troop withdrawals.

III. SHOWDOWN.

*"We cannot change politics; we must do our duty
silently."*

General Werner Von Fritsch

Commander -in-Chief of the German Army, 1934-1938²³

"One does not win his battles by going public."

General Bernard W. Rogers, Chief of Staff of the United

States Army, 1977.²⁴

While Roger's fateful conversation with Singlaub was taking place, key members of the administration were preparing to depart for Korea. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Philip C. Habib and the Chairman of the JCS, Gen. George Brown, had been designated as special envoys with the mission to persuade the Park regime that the proposed pull -out did not signify a weakening of the United States resolve to defend South Korea, and to consult with Park and his ministers on the scale and timing of the five-year withdrawal plan.²⁵ Carter had announced his policy decision in a manner which irritated a Congress already sensitized by the friction generated by the Nixon administration.

As noted in the hearings conducted by the House of Representatives on the decision to withdraw troops from Korea, Congress had never been officially notified of the plan and had never considered or debated the policy decision. In fact, it had only recently overwhelmingly defeated a radical withdrawal proposal generated within the House Armed Services Committee itself.²⁶ Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that Carter's actions were without public support,²⁷ for

the record of the Park Regime on human rights was abysmal, and Park himself was both unyielding and arrogant. If Carter viewed the withdrawal as one means of influence which the Park regime would understand, he was not without reason. However, the overall atmosphere was characterized by a prickly tension between the Carter administration, Congress, and the Pentagon. Even the administration itself was split on the Korea policy. As the then Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, points out, *"In the Pentagon, civilians and generals alike were totally opposed, of course, as were most of my own associates in the East Asian Bureau..."* (author's underlining)²⁸

It was into this atmosphere that Maj. Gen. Singlaub boldly strode. Singlaub granted John Saar of the Washington Post an interview on May 19, 1977, just days before the administration envoys were to arrive. Singlaub commented bluntly that the withdrawal plan was ill-advised, opposed by many of *"the senior military people"* and would lead to war with North Korea. He expressed his deep concern that policymakers might have been working with outdated intelligence, citing a recent intelligence estimate that demonstrated that North Korea was much stronger than had been previously thought. Despite his outspoken opposition to the policy decision, Singlaub also took the position *"If the decision is made we will execute it with enthusiasm and a high level of professional skill"*. The interview also included reference to the misgivings of Gen. John W. Vessey, then Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations and U.S. forces in Korea and his deputy, Lt. Gen John J. Burns. Unidentified sources were quoted as saying that Vessey had expressed his concerns directly to Carter and Defense Secretary Harold Brown.²⁹ Both the Washington Post and the New York Times featured articles on the interview. The administration's response was not long in coming. Several hours after the publication of the interview, the White House announced that Maj. Gen. Singlaub had been told to report personally to the President at the White House.³⁰ This was a rare and unusual order³¹ and did not escape the notice of the press, who fanned the fires by publishing succeeding articles which called into question the decision-making processes of the administration.

John Saar, following-up his initial interview, reported on May 20th that Singlaub's fellow officers in Korea privately supported his position but would not speak out publicly for fear of receiving similar treatment. He also reported that Singlaub's commander, Gen. Vessey, had stated to the United Press International as early as April 30th that "*the withdrawal of all American ground troops would raise the possibility of war in Korea*". Vessey, however, had been careful to qualify his statements as being the view of the on-scene commander - recognizing that the overall view and political decision of the President should prevail. Unattributed sources were quoted as saying that Singlaub had no intention of undermining the President but had only attempted to contribute to what he thought was a still-evolving policy.¹² Meanwhile, others entered the fray. Former President Ford responded to a question about the recall of Singlaub by supporting the President's action as an instance of asserting clear civilian control over the military. Melvin Laird, Nixon's Secretary of Defense, concurred with administration's assessment on the advisability of troop withdrawals from South Korea, and the Chairman of the JCS, Gen. Brown, himself in a touchy position due to his publicized remarks charging that Jews exercised disproportionate control over the media, opined that "*Nobody has said the military cannot disagree. But there's such a thing as tact.*".¹³ Soon the Congress would seek a place on the stage as the drama unfolded.

Maj. Gen. Singlaub returned to the United States late on the 20th of May. The following day, President Carter held two publicly scheduled meetings. The first was with Habib and Brown to finalize preparations for their consultations with the South Koreans. The second was a brief thirty minute meeting with Maj. Gen. Singlaub. Less than an hour after this meeting the Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, announced Singlaub's dismissal as Chief of Staff, U.S. Forces, Korea. Officially, Brown's position was that he had recommended the reassignment of Singlaub because his public statements challenging announced national policy compromised his ability to carry out his duties in Korea. In particular, the administration pointed out that part of his duties as Chief of Staff involved conducting negotiations with the North Koreans and that his statements had

damaged his ability to effectively perform this duty.³⁴ Singlaub himself was slated to return to Korea only to gather his family and belongings and return to the United States pending the identification of a new assignment. Parallels were almost immediately drawn with Truman's firing of MacArthur, who had also publicly opposed the Korean Policy of a President³⁵.

However, information was already coming to light that the "*public challenge*" may not have been intentional - at least on an attributable basis. Bernard Weinraub reported in the New York Times that Singlaub had informed the Pentagon that he had assumed the interview was on background, and not for direct attribution.³⁶ Regardless of the circumstances surrounding his interview, Maj. Gen. Singlaub was now at center stage, and would find it difficult to exit quietly. Congress sensed the opportunity to reassert its role in the development and conduct of foreign policy. Singlaub therefore was requested to testify before a subcommittee of the the House Armed Services Committee, which had swiftly initiated a review of the decision to withdraw troops from Korea. The press correctly identified the hearings as a "*frontal assault*" on Carter's Korea Policy.³⁷ Thus, Maj. Gen. Singlaub found himself testifying before Congress on the 25th of May, scant days since he had been interviewed by Saar for the Washington Post

The hearings led off with Maj. Gen. Singlaub but eventually encompassed the entire military chain-of-command. The immediate effect of the hearings was to fuel a growing resistance to the withdrawal of troops from Korea. In a sense, the showdown was not between the administration and Singlaub, who maintained that he had not been aware that his comments were for the record³⁸, but between the administration and Congress. Several days after Singlaub's testimony before Congress, Gen. Rogers, the Army Chief of Staff, announced that Maj. Gen. Singlaub would be assigned as the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army Forces Command, confirming the President's prior announcement that Singlaub was to assume a new position of equivalent responsibility and status [to Singlaub's previous position]. Coupled with the President's public announcement that

Singlaub had been neither "*chastised or punished*"³⁹, it appeared that the personal breach between Carter and Singlaub had been healed, at least on the surface.

IV. REASONED COURAGE OR FOLLY?

"I will go to my death with that lapse in courage."

*Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff of the United States
Army.⁴⁰*

General Harold K. Johnson lamented that he had not resigned over the conduct of the war in Vietnam, rationalizing at the time that he could do more by staying on and working within the system. Such a resignation would certainly have brought into public view his, and his peers, discontent with the policy, or lack thereof, for prosecution of the war in Vietnam. As noted in the introductory quotes to the previous section, others have felt that policy was simply not in the realm of the soldier or that dissent, if any, should be done out of the public's eye. Yet the Singlaub Affair acted as a catalyst for the initiation of a successful challenge to Presidential Policy, regardless whether Singlaub's actions were laudable or not. While we may never know whether that policy would have eventually been overturned through other means, the Singlaub Affair does offer limited evidence countering one of the theses raised by Col. Lloyd J. Mathews in his article, *Resignation in Protest*⁴¹ - that more can be done by remaining within the system. The headlines generated by Singlaub's statements eventually drew sufficient public concern to allow others who opposed the withdrawal to marshal forces in strength. A Presidential Decision was then forced into a public forum for debate. Was this truly, then, a case of a soldier taking his case to the public, with all the attendant penalties? Did Singlaub truly believe that war was the inevitable outcome of following Carter's Korea policy and were his actions ethically consistent? Did Singlaub reach the conclusion that to remain silent constituted "improper support" and to speak out "proper dissent"?

As already discussed, there were early press reports that Maj. Gen. Singlaub had denied that he had actually been speaking with the intent of publicly going on the record as opposing the withdrawal. His testimony before the House Armed Services Committee made this both a matter of public record and vividly clear. He explained that *"...some will believe that regardless of whether I thought my remarks were for nonattribution, my aim was still the same - to take issue with our country's stated national security policy. However, I can state categorically that such was not my intent."*⁴²

Singlaub strove to demonstrate that at the time of the interview, he was under the impression that he was providing background material to assist a reporter (Saar) to understand the complexities of the Korean situation. Further, Singlaub noted he had provided the reporter with his opinion that senior ROK officers believed that Carter's withdrawal proposal would lead to war. He had expressed his own agreement with this view from a purely military viewpoint, and had noted that he did not take into account political factors which were properly the domain of the President. In sum, he attributed the events which followed to his naiveness about press relations.⁴³

The interviewer, however, disputed this position. John Saar stated that while the interview with Singlaub had been arranged by a staffer, with whom he had been conducting an off-the-record interview, there had been no such precondition placed upon his interview with Singlaub. In fact, Saar stated that he specifically gave Singlaub his understanding that the interview was for the record. Singlaub had then asked if that had been the basis of Saar's interview with Gen. Burns, and when Saar responded affirmatively, had stated *"Well, make it on the record..."*. Saar also stated that he had heard that the general had tried to have his staff call⁴⁴ and impose retroactive rules upon him, but that no one had actually ever contacted him.⁴⁵ Singlaub's testimony contradicted this version of events. While Singlaub concurred that he and Saar had conferred over the telephone, events had transpired somewhat differently. Saar had asked for confirmation that the interview had been on the record, and he (Singlaub) had insisted it was not. Saar then brought up the fact that Singlaub had not specified nonattribution during the interview

and Singlaub agreed. Finally, Saar stated that unless Singlaub was prepared to retract or change his statements he would file the story as is. At this point Singlaub stated "*Well, I guess I can't stop you*".⁴⁶

Whether or not this was, in fact, a case of naivete in dealing with the press, Maj. Gen. Singlaub certainly did not learn from experience. Barely a year later, during a question-and-answer period following an address to the Reserve Officer Training Corps candidates at Georgia Tech, Singlaub termed the administration's decision not to produce the neutron bomb ridiculous and militarily unsound. News representatives were present, although again the claim was made that the criticism was inadvertently made public through misunderstanding the ground rules for his comments⁴⁷. Maj. Gen. Singlaub was again summoned to a meeting in Washington, D.C. although this time he met with military officials. His commanding officer, Gen. Frederick Kroesen, recommended that Singlaub be permitted to retire, and a terse Army announcement noted that the recommendation had been accepted.⁴⁸

Although the record indicates that he had many points of contention with the Carter administration, and that he was not averse to commenting on policies that he believed were unsound, Maj. Gen. Singlaub denied that he had attempted to take issue with the country's national security policy.⁴⁹ This is difficult to reconcile with his statements and actions. Whether or not his remarks were for attribution they constituted a vocal disagreement with publicly announced policy. If Singlaub had not meant to challenge policy, then what of his belief that the withdrawal of ground forces from Korea would lead to war? Was it ethically consistent to hold that belief and not speak up?

Maj. Gen. Singlaub maintained his position that withdrawal would lead to war during his testimony before Congress. Certainly it appears that while other senior officers may have had misgivings, they did not see the withdrawal in as a grim a light. General Rogers, for example, felt

that Singlaub had not taken into account other compensatory actions which were to accompany the withdrawal.⁵⁰ Further, his testimony made it clear that subsequent to the President rejecting the recommendations of the JCS, he could have gone directly to the President, if he had so desired.⁵¹ The Chairman of the JCS, Gen. Brown, confirmed that the JCS had been part of the security review process leading to the President's decision to withdraw troops from Korea, and that compensatory actions executed in a timely manner in conjunction with the withdrawal would assure a successful defense against an attack against South Korea.⁵² At the time of the hearings, then, it was difficult to substantiate reasons for a strong belief that withdrawal would lead to war, although the comments of the senior military leadership contained enough carefully qualified statements to clearly give the impression that they were not particularly satisfied with the direction of the administration's policy. Yet a state of satisfaction or disaffection for a policy is clearly different in degree to a position based on moral and ethical grounds.

The example of Dr. Margot O'Toole, cited earlier, is illustrative. She had a fundamental problem of professional ethics with the research paper of Dr. Imanishi-Kari. Reviews of Imanishi-Kari's work done within the scientific establishment found no serious flaws that would not be discovered by other scientists and Imanishi-Kari herself agreed that there had been a "misstatement". Given the fundamental ethical problem with characterizing some fifteen pages of falsified data as a "misstatement", O'Toole felt she could not accept the decision of her superiors, who had not carefully examined all relevant material, that the matter was one of scientific interpretation. A line had been crossed.⁵³ The example of Imanishi-Kari and O'Toole is useful as a case in which a subordinate initially used the chain of command available to question actions by senior colleagues. When her seniors arrived at a "policy decision", so to speak, supporting the status quo, O'Toole made a courageous decision to continue her opposition to a course of action she was convinced was fundamentally flawed, although such opposition took her out of the institution to which she belonged and into a public venue. When she did so, not only was her professional judgement questioned, but her seeming lack of loyalty to the scientific

institution was castigated because she had called into question the judgement of fellow professionals.

General Harold K. Johnson saw that line also, however he did not take the action he later saw as both appropriate and necessary. The difficulty in the Singlaub Affair is determining whether or not a clear line differentiated disagreement with Carter's withdrawal policy from a case of professional military officers mildly disagreeing with the interpretation of the eventual outcome, or one in which the outcome was so serious as to test professional and personal ethics of the country's military leadership. Senior officers clearly did not consider a moral or ethical compulsion to publicly repudiate the policy. Maj. Gen. Singlaub, while stating he believed it would lead to war, maintained that he had no intention to publicly challenge the policy and would have carried out any final policy decision...*despite the fact that he believed it would plunge us into another war on the Korean Peninsula* (author's italics). Mathew Cooper, analyzing the failures of the German professional military caste, points out that although they believed a limit was set to their resistance to Hitler by their duty of military obedience they were quite wrong. There are such limits when the lives of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands are at stake.⁵⁴ So too is it ultimately unjustifiable to fall back on the argument that public disagreement with policy is unacceptable in cases where the stakes are similarly high. But was that the case with respect to Korea? The evidence, or at least the testimony of senior military leaders, seems to say otherwise.

As the Singlaub Affair amply demonstrated, policy changes can be effected by even inadvertent actions of an individual. The difficulty remains in possessing that insight which allows such moral differentiation, and possessing the moral courage to stand alone, if necessary, and to accept the consequences of taking what will always be a lonely and painful road. The Singlaub Affair leaves no clean lines of demarcation. Any analysis can only show relative merits, while the absolutes-based on moral and ethical convictions- remain rooted in the individuals. Carter did

not withdraw troops from Korea as planned so the question of whether or not withdrawal would have precipitated conflict will remain unanswered. Singlaub's own motives seem clear at first glance but his subsequent testimony muddies the waters and removes much of the moral or ethical underpinning from his actions, and his statements upon retirement, charging the administration with not being completely honest and engaging in a hoax in discussing the withdrawal of troops from Korea⁶⁶ only further confuse a researcher seeking a moral high ground. The answers to the questions I sought in researching the Singlaub Affair, appear to be - perhaps tragically - mundane.

V. CONCLUSIONS.

"High White House drama only served to give it far more significance and substance than it deserved."

Washington Post Editorial, 1977.

I conclude that Maj. Gen. Singlaub disagreed with the policy to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea and wished to see that policy changed, but not quite in a way that involved him so directly and personally. A Washington Post editorial characterized him, perhaps unkindly, as a *"well decorated combat officer of no intellectual pretensions, past his peak and destined only for retirement, making some irresponsible remarks."*⁴⁶ Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub deserves a better career epitaph than that, but the uncalculated actions of a few minutes duration cast a pall over a long and distinguished career. Blunt, outspoken perhaps, but with a reputation for honesty, Singlaub found himself at the center of a larger conflict involving the Carter administration with, at one time or another, numerous and entrenched centers of power Washington.

Maj. Gen. Singlaub sought to characterize his remarks to Saar as background information provided with the intent of allowing the position of Republic of Korea officials to be known prior to the meeting with the Presidential envoys, Habib and Brown. Singlaub observed that it was only when he expressed his personal opinion that he *"got into trouble"*. I believe it is fair to say that for a person in his position such remarks were inflammatory, and he was obligated to ensure that he knew the context in which he was making those remarks. There is conflicting testimony as to whether he understood the ground rules at the time of the interview - - a good argument for the suggestion of Richard Halloran that the services formerly adopt dealing with the press as part of

the well-rounded officer's education at all levels⁵⁸ - but little doubt that prior to publication he realized he was to be quoted directly. By his admission, he declined to retract or change his statement when offered the opportunity. Singlaub also admitted that he was aware that the President had definitely decided to withdraw ground troops from Korea⁵⁹ which casts his statement that he was prepared to carry out the policy *once a decision had been made* in a confused light. That is, he chose to dispute the wisdom of the policy, even if off-the-record, knowing the decision had been made. Yet this confusion alone does not explain the unsatisfactory chain of events that trailed Singlaub into retirement. Singlaub's actions appear to have placed him in a position where he had difficulty determining where his duty lay. He wavered between the institutional credos of loyalty and obedience and some sort of personal moral stand. He appears to have attempted to influence policy by providing off-the-record background while stating he was prepared to execute the policy if it could not be changed. However, even that latter statement was qualified in his own testimony before Congress. Although he testified that he felt that if a decision had been made he was required to execute it and not speak out publicly, he added that the President's decision to remove him from his position in Korea had certain benefits for him. In particular, he *"might have been faced with some serious decisions if (he) had returned to Korea and found the decision was made and (he) was ordered to execute it... (he) would face a very serious personal problem as to whether (he) would have to retire rather than participate in that decision"*⁶⁰ Thus, while public disagreement he considered an improper form of dissent, retirement rather than participation in the execution of the decision was proper. However, he had knowingly already contributed to public dissent with the policy.

Maj. Gen. Singlaub clearly struggled to establish rationale for his past actions, but his contradictory statements do not make a strong basis for elevation of his downfall to classic proportions. Carter's genuine concern for human rights have left his failed policies cast in some semblance of a martyr's light, no such light traces the faded steps of John Singlaub. His efforts to explain his position before Congress only put him in contention with his military superiors on

various points, while at the same time he was reiterating his soldierly emphasis on carrying out assigned duties without publicly challenging what he saw as bad policy. Extraordinary action appears to have been precipitated through oversight rather than design and despite the adverse consequences that ensued, no credit can be given when the intent is lacking.

A sense of ambiguity is left at the end of the trail, which only serves to illustrate how difficult it is to know when and how to exercise moral courage, supposing we have it. It must clearly be accompanied by a fine and practiced judgement able to differentiate between almost invisible lines in the sand. Perhaps that wisdom which comes from experience also teaches us to moderate our temperament, or perhaps to control it rather than the contrary. Youth has often been associated with impetuosity and an intolerance that often results in decisive commitments without careful assessment of the consequences. In that sense it is easier to understand both the quick intolerance of a young officer and the measured exasperation, at times, of those who have reached the upper rungs of our profession. Harold R. Winton concluded that the successful military reformer must harbor a radical intellect in a traditional temperament.⁽¹⁾ However, his argument may apply to more than just those who seek to reform the Army. A moderate - or perhaps more aptly, a mature - temperament may very well be a criteria for successful leadership at the highest levels of today's Army. The consequences of reversing the blend is counterproductive for the institution and the individual.

Singlaub had a number of options through which he could, and perhaps did, challenge the wisdom of Carter's Korean policy. If we accept his statements that he was obligated not to challenge the policy publicly once the decision had been made, it is difficult to reconcile his statements with his actions, and it is the difficulty of reconciling his deeds and his actions which, in the end, colors my interpretation of his intentions. Thus I conclude that the path which lead to his eventual retirement seems more likely to have been based upon a series of judgemental errors perhaps indicative of an immature temperament. While difficult to assess, perhaps the first

error was his opinion that the policy would lead inevitably to war. As the testimony of his superiors before Congress indicated, there were other factors which he may not have considered in drawing that conclusion. His second error was in discussing the issue with Saar without knowing the ground rules, and compounding the error by providing his own opinion when his stated purpose was to provide the positions of the Korean officials. Here perhaps his temperament compounded his judgemental error. Bluntness in itself is not necessarily a fault. Wedded to a lapse in judgement, however, it can be fatal. Singlaub apparently had the opportunity to back away from his first public statements, although the exact nature of the choice differs according to the source. He chose to be publicly quoted. Later he testified before Congress and reiterated the same opinions which, in print, resulted in his recall from Korea. I believe the end result placed Maj. Gen. Singlaub in a position in which he sought to justify his actions after the fact, reflected in Congressional testimony which on the one hand indicated he was committed to carrying out policy decisions once made, and on the other, that he would have been faced with the decision to retire rather than carry out such policy decisions. The Singlaub Affair, then, is illustrative of the difficulties encountered by officers as they grow in seniority, responsibility, and access to the media. It also illustrates the difficulties in developing the fine sense of judgement necessary to moral and ethical differentiation, the problems associated with applying such judgement, and the importance of temperament to judgement.

¹ Alan Ned Sabrosky (Assistant Professor of Politics, The Catholic University of America), in a *Letter to the Editor*, *The Washington Post*, p. A-16, Col. 3, May 25, 1977.

² John Saar, *U.S. General: Korea Pullout Risks War*, *The Washington Post*, p. A-1, Col. 6, May 19, 1977. Saar included statements, attributed and non-attributed, supporting at least the general concerns of Singlaub. In fact, upon the article's continuation on p. A-14, the title had been changed to read: *U.S. Generals in S. Korea Hit Carter's Pullout Plan*. The latter title would certainly have been even more attention-worthy and it raises the question of why it was not used as the leading caption. Perhaps the more general claim was less supportable by directly attributable statements.

³ Albin Krebs, *Notes on People*, *The New York Times*, Section III, p.2, Col. 4, 1 June 1978.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17, Col. 1, 27 May 1978.

⁵ As the reader will note during the course of this paper, both the Press and Congress sought in the Singlaub Affair an opportunity to advance their own agendas. In the case of the Press, my own observation is that it is extremely easy to couch reports in terms which favor an institutional or personal bias by stating a fact without contextual explanation, and relying on the reader to draw a conclusion that may in fact be unwarranted had the reporter more fully covered the issue. This, of course, is a matter for ethical debate amongst the Press, but serves to emphasize at least one of the irritants between the reported

and the reporters. My conclusion is that no senior official should grant interviews without having some idea of the possible agendas which the prospective interviewer brings to the interview.

⁷ Bernard Weinraub, *General Forced into Retirement Charges Carter Ignored Joint Chiefs*, The New York Times, p. 8, 3 June 1978. Apparently Singlaub's parting shots evinced little or no response, and soon The Singlaub Affair, as it was known, disappeared from media view.

⁸ Philip J. Hults, *Hero in Exposing Science Hoax Paid Dearly*, The New York Times, p. A-1, col. 2, 22 March 1991.

⁹ Matthew Cooper, *The German Army 1933-1945, Its Political and Military Failure*, Bonanza Books, New York, 1984. Cooper concludes that the German generals, despite possessing on the whole high personal standards of morality, allowed their sense of obedience to pervert their sense of honor and dull their conscience. An interesting and penetrating analysis, which clearly demonstrates the danger of apoliticism *in extremis*.

¹⁰ Malham M. Wakin (Editor), *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, The Military Mind, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo, 1986, p. 47. The study of the German Officer Corps remains extremely interesting because the case itself is so extreme. During the course of my research I was struck by so many references to obedience amongst an officer corps that showed itself to be capable of tactical initiative and blunt disobedience (as in the case of Rommel). Yet the association of the German Officer with an almost blind obedience continues to pervade literature and folklore. In David Irving's autobiography of Goring, for example, a Swedish doctor is quoted as stating (concerning Goring during his commitment to the Langbro Asylum) "One never knew how he would react, but since he had been a German officer he found it easy to obey".

¹¹ Wakin, *Conflicting Loyalties*, p. 167.

¹² Donald S. Spencer, *The Carter Implosion*, Praeger, New York, 1988, pp. 19-23.

¹³ Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colo, pp. - .

¹⁴ Rozell, p.41.

¹⁵ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices - Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷ Uncredited, *Carter plans to Visit South Korea in June after Tokyo Meeting*, The New York Times, p.8, Col. 6, 20 April 1977.

¹⁸ Donald S. Spencer, *The Carter Implosion*, pp.50-51.

¹⁹ Hearings on the Review of the Policy Decision to Withdraw United States Ground Forces From Korea before the Investigations Subcommittee and also the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives (hereinafter referred to as H.A.S.C. No. 95-71), Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1978, p. 17.

²⁰ Richard Halloran, *U.S. Study Supports Korea Pullout*, The New York Times, p. A-4, col. 3, 19 May 1977.

²¹ H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, Statement of Gen. Cushman, p. 269.

²² H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, Statement of General Bernard W. Rogers, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, pp. 78-81.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.83-84.

²⁴ Cooper, p. 14.

²⁵ H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, Statement of Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, p.77.

²⁶ John Saar, *U.S. Team in Troop Talks Faces a Skeptical South Korea*, The Washington Post, p. A-7, col. 3, 24 May 1977.

²⁷ H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, p. 2.

²⁸ Spencer, p.51.

²⁹ Vance, p. 129.

³⁰ Saar, *U.S. General: Korea Pullout Risks War*, p. A-1 and p. A-14.

³¹ Unattributed, *Carter Summons General in Korea Over Criticism of Withdrawal Plan*, The New York Times, p. 4, col. 3, May 20, 1977.

³¹ While the Singlaub Affair goes unmentioned in the administration memoirs of Carter, his National Security Advisor, Brzezinski, and his Secretary of State, Vance, some idea of the sensitivity of the issue can be gleaned in the memoirs of Brzezinski, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977-1981. He reproduces a memo to the President on p. 28 which provided humorous recommendations as to actions to be taken against Amy Carter for allegedly having contact with soviet dissidents. The first, and by implication most severe, recommendation is to have Amy call on the President for a personal report "on the model of General Singlaub".

³² John Saar, *Singlaub's Colleagues Also Oppose GI Pullout*, The Washington Post, p. 5, col 1, May 21, 1977.

³³ George C. Wilson, *Ford Supports Carter Action on Korea Staff Chief*, The Washington Post, p. 5, col. 4, May 21, 1977.

³⁴ Austin Scott, *President Fires Gen. Singlaub as Korea Staff Chief*, The Washington Post, p. A-1, col. 5, May 22, 1977. Maj. Gen. Singlaub served as senior United Nations representative on the Joint Military Armistice Commission, and in this capacity conducted direct discussions with the chief North Korean representative at Panmunjom.

³⁵ Warren Brown, *Carter Had No Choice On Singlaub, Byrd Says*, The Washington Post, p. 3, col. 1, May 23, 1977. MacArthur's dismissal resulted in calls for the impeachment of Truman by members of Congress, and MacArthur himself returned to a hero's welcome and the adulation of the American public.

³⁶ Bernard Weinraub, *General Returns From Korea to Face Carter*, The New York Times, p. 5, col. 1-4, May 21, 1977.

³⁷ George C. Wilson, *House Panel Begins Frontal Assault On Korea Policy*, The Washington Post, p. 1, col 1, May 26 1977. Not all Members of Congress supported the hearings. Rep. Pat Schroeder (D-Colo) termed the hearings a "kangaroo court".

³⁸ H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, *Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub*, p. 4.

³⁹ Harold Logan, *Gen. Singlaub Given Prized Staff Position*, The Washington Post, p. A-6, col 1.

⁴⁰ Lloyd J. Mathews and Dale E. Brown, *Introductory Quotes by Col Harry G. Summers, Jr., The Parameters of Military Ethics*, Pergamon-Brassey's, International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989, p. xvii.

⁴¹ Col. Lloyd K. Mathews, *Resignation in Protest*, Army, January 1990. While much of this article concerns the act of resignation, and effectively refutes the notion that there have recently been a number of true resignations in protest against policy, Mathews also continues the refrain that truly exemplar individuals should remain within the system where they can influence other developing soldiers, and act as moral guides. While there is a long-term institutional gain from this approach, it does not effectively address the consequences of failure to stop bankrupt policies. In particular, the aftermath of Vietnam saw both the Army weakened and riddled with poor morale and other problems, and the nation tarred with the *soubriquet* of "paper tiger".

⁴² H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, *Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub*, p. 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Singlaub testified he had called his Public Affairs Officer and directed him to get in touch with Saar following the interview as he was concerned that the interview might have been considered on the record. H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, p. 9.

⁴⁵ John Saar, *Background on the Singlaub Affair*, The Washington Post, p. 14, col. 3, June 3, 1977.

⁴⁶ H.A.S.C. No. 95-71, *Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Bernard Weinraub, *General Forced Into Retirement Charges Carter Ignored Joint Chiefs*, The New York Times Magazine, Section III, p. 8, col 1, June 3, 1978.

⁴⁸ Uncredited, *General Who Attacked Carter Plans Agrees to Retire*, The New York Times, p. 8, col. 3, April 29, 1978.

⁴⁹ H.A.S.C. 95-71, *Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *Statement of Gen. Bernard W. Rogers*, p. 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, *Statement of Gen. George S. Brown, USAF, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, p. 111.

⁵³ Philip J. Hiltz, *How Charges of Lab Fraud Grew Into A Cause Celebre*, The New York Times, p. C-5, March 26, 1991.

⁵⁴ Cooper, p. 557.

⁵⁵ Bernard Weinraub, *General Forced Into Retirement Charges Carter Ignored Joint Chiefs*, The New York Times, p. 8, col. 1, June 3, 1978.

⁵⁶ Editorial, The Washington Post, p. 18, col. 1, May 24, 1977.

⁵⁷ Richard Halloran, *Soldiers and Scribblers Revisited: Working With The Media*, Parameters, Vol. XXI, No. 1, Spring 1991, p. 19. Halloran advocates First Amendment training for junior officers, with progressively more comprehensive courses thru Senior Service College, culminating in a tactics and gamesmanship tutorial at General Officer Charm School.

⁵⁸ H.A.S.C. 95-71, *Statement of Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁰ Harold R. Winton, To Change An Army: General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and British Army Doctrine, 1927-1938, University Press of Kansas, 1988, p. 240.

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